

◆ William Cooke, Steward of the Sheffield Estate 1828–1832

by Malcolm Lill

The first two decades of the eighteenth century saw the birth of the 2nd Earl of Sheffield, the death of the 1st Earl and the beginnings of a decline in the fortunes of the Sheffield estate. Despite the appointment of an efficient estate steward in 1828, there was to be an inexorable movement downwards in the quality and production of the estate throughout the remainder of its occupancy by the Holroyd family.

When William Cooke was appointed in 1828, agriculture had been in decline throughout the country and many estates, including Sheffield, were suffering from insufficient capital for the maintenance of infrastructure and the purchasing of livestock. An estate steward, at this time, would have had to attend to many problems and often the necessary resources would not have been made available by the landowner. In order to fulfil his obligations, a steward would often find himself in an exposed position where a wrong move could result in him upsetting both his employer and also others who had an interest in the estate.

Cooke would come to be in just such a position and his loyalty to his employer, his adherence to his own principles and his pragmatic approach to the solving of difficult situations, would result in an untenable situation for the Sheffield estate steward. Despite his ability to manage the Earl of Sheffield's affairs efficiently, when it came to a choice between Cooke's expertise and political expediency, the earl chose to sacrifice the long-term wellbeing of the estate for the sake of 'peace in his time'.

INTRODUCTION

The importance of efficient estate stewards cannot be overstated. Referring to stewardship in the north of England a century before the events recorded here, Hainsworth makes the observation that stewards were vital to the society of their time because 'they helped to make the mechanisms of that society possible and their labours helped those mechanisms to operate smoothly'. He continues by underlining the vital function of these men in facilitating the very lifestyles of the landed proprietors; 'The steward was a 'governor' in the mechanical as well as the vice-regal meaning of the word.'¹ Stewardships ranged from large-scale organizations such as that founded by Nathaniel Kent in the late eighteenth century, with commissions to oversee Thomas Coke's holdings at Holkham and the royal estates at Windsor and Richmond, to the management of a few thousand acres of relatively poor farming land in areas such as the Sussex Weald. The rewards were correspondingly disparate; whilst Kent received material recognition and the approbation of 'the

elite' in Norfolk, a steward at Sheffield in Sussex was to suffer persecution and ignominy for attempting to serve the interests of his employer.²

The Royal Commission on the Land of Wales and Monmouthshire, in its report of 1896, recommended that estate managers should undergo a rigorous education and training to enable them to take responsibility for the efficient organization of all aspects of estate work. In consequence, it was only at the very end of the nineteenth century that the thinking and practice that had gradually evolved over the preceding one hundred years, was formalized. It is unlikely that the majority of nineteenth-century land agents had, however, benefited from an education as recommended by the Royal Commission. Even when the Royal Agricultural College at Cirencester opened in 1845, few of those for whom it was intended would have had the resources to afford training in such an establishment and it is very unlikely that any of the stewards employed at Sheffield during the nineteenth century would have had that benefit. For an estate to survive at this time, either the landowner would have to oversee the work himself,

as did John, 1st Baron Ashburnham, on his estates in Bedfordshire, Carmarthen and Sussex, or put his trust in a steward who, if the proprietor was fortunate, would oversee a thriving enterprise.³

In his book on estate management, which concentrates mainly on late seventeenth- and eighteenth-century affairs on the Leveson-Gower estates, Wordie argues: 'By contrast to the old tenant-bailiffs ... , these new men were primarily estate agents All were literate and had some knowledge of accounting.' With the rise in the level of expertise of the steward or agent, problems would arise if the proprietor did not have as sound a grasp of the requirements for the efficient management of his estate as did his principal manager. Stewards in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries had to contend with the whims, and often the ignorance, of the landowner. Many would have had to suffer harsh judgements and ill-informed demands. Mingay, when referring to Sir Jacob Bouverie's treatment of his steward, Henry Barton, writes: 'He would be admonished: "whilst you undertake my business act in it and bestir yourself the best possible, ... transact honestly and diligently all my Affairs".'⁴

The importance of a professional agent to manage an estate is stressed by Beckett, when he refers to Caird who '...was amongst those who noted that uninformed owners were the most likely to employ lawyers or other incompetents to run their estates.'⁵ Giving as an example the agent George Plaxton, steward of the Leveson-Gower estates c. 1689–1720, Wordie describes him as being 'many years ahead of his time'.⁶ Tact, diplomacy, foresight and honesty were all traits that a potential employer would count as essential, in addition to professional qualifications and experience. Plaxton was setting a new standard and one against which stewards of all estates would doubtless be measured in the future.

Sheffield in Sussex, situated on exposures of Tunbridge Wells and Ashdown Sands, with isolated pockets of Wadhurst Clay, covered about 4000 acres in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. It consisted of approximately equal areas of woodland, grazing and arable, mainly in the parish of Fletching, but also some acres in the parishes of Danehill, Chailey, Horsted Keynes, Lindfield and Newick. The soil, being acidic, required constant treatment with chalk, marl or lime to raise the pH. There were between 30 and 40 small farms,

many of which were barely viable.⁷ The estate, on the southern margin of the High Weald, had provided subsistence farming for its inhabitants for upwards of 1000 years, but it would be well into the twentieth century before agriculture reached a level that could be regarded as efficient and employ reasonably economic means of production.⁸

John Holroyd (1735–1821) of Ferrybridge in Yorkshire, purchased the Sheffield estate in 1769. In 1798 he succeeded Sir John Sinclair as President of the Board of Agriculture. Holroyd received three baronies between 1781 and 1802 and the earldom of Sheffield in 1816.⁹ The period from Holroyd's purchase to the second decade of the nineteenth century was fairly profitable for farming generally. However, from the end of the Napoleonic wars until the final 'Golden Age' in the latter half of the century, economic conditions, depressed markets for produce, difficult labour relations, poverty and poor management by the landowner resulted in a general decline in agricultural output.

There appears to be no obvious family succession of the stewards employed by the Holroyds in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Open competition seems to have been their policy.¹⁰ But, whether this was indeed policy or due to circumstances, is not obvious. In the larger estates of this period it was not unknown for several generations of a family to take on the responsibility of management and the vast Leveson-Gower holdings, in the eighteenth century, is a prime example. As Wordie writes: 'Without exception, all the chief agents had secured employment for one or more members of their family, usually brothers.'¹¹

On the first Earl's death in 1821, George Holroyd, Viscount Pevensy, inherited the estate and earldom. He married Harriet Lascelles (1802–1889), the eldest of the four daughters of Henry, the second Earl of Harewood, in June 1825. George's protected childhood and education and his inheritance of the earldom of Sheffield at the age of nineteen, precluded him from obtaining a broader experience of the realities of the world at large. Neither George Holroyd nor his son would match the achievements of John, first Earl of Sheffield. Beckett quotes a comment by Arthur Ponsonby of the Queen's staff, referring to the new nobility: '... after a generation or two the boast of noble blood will be made and habits of idleness and indolence will be fully developed. All the grit

and force of character, which made the first peer successful, will have disappeared.’¹²

As the nineteenth century progressed and the returns from agricultural land diminished, the need became ever more pressing for estates to employ a steward who would co-ordinate the agricultural and maintenance schedules and achieve a reasonable economic success. Without such a manager, a difficult time in the agricultural industry of the Sussex Weald could lead to disastrous outcomes for landowners and tenant farmers. In the late 1820s a steward was to be appointed at Sheffield who would be able to manage the estate and bring it to ‘respectability’.

When George succeeded his father, it was at a transitional stage in the philosophy of estate management in England.¹³ Spring states that land agents should be responsible for ‘receiving rents, selecting tenants, negotiating agreements and leases, maintaining and improving the permanent equipment of the estate, spurring tenants to greater enterprise, participating in local government, even invigilating parochial morality’. He also quotes John Beasley, land agent to the Spencer estates, who wrote that a land agent should ‘be enough of a builder to know how a building can be well and economically done; enough of an engineer to design and direct ordinary engineering works; he should understand draining works and be something of a chemist and a geologist.’¹⁴ This list of responsibilities would have represented much that stewards, such as William Cooke, who managed Sheffield in the late 1820s and early 1830s, would have been expected to undertake.¹⁵

As the nineteenth century progressed it was becoming obvious to enlightened landowners that the maintenance of their properties in good order was a priority. Also, to maximize the efficiency of the workforce, the quality of life for the farm labourers would have to be improved. The Duke of Bedford ‘continued to exercise the landowner’s traditional economic function of encouraging and assisting his tenants in their cultivation; by the mid-nineteenth century such encouragement and assistance cost more than it ever had before’.¹⁶ Caird’s description of the farms and farming methods to be found in the Sussex Weald illustrates the problems faced by landowners in this part of the country.¹⁷ Short discusses the problem of the ‘petty jealousies’ amongst the tradesmen and itinerant artisans of the High Weald living

in ‘open’ communities, which, together with the dissatisfaction of a large part of the farm labour force, was a catalyst that precipitated the Swing disturbances.¹⁸ Uneasy alliances between the estate workers and the more independent artisans and small businessmen of the surrounding area were always a source of friction, requiring only the least degree of suspicion and mistrust to evoke a disproportionate reaction on the part of one or other of the two groups. The Sheffield estate needed a manager who, besides possessing skills in agricultural matters, had the ability to work with members of the local community.

STEWARDSHIP BEFORE COOKE

The succession of estate stewards at Sheffield between 1800 and 1828, Joseph Richards, Richard Holman, Joseph Adkins, Samuel Hews, Lupton and Thomas Turner, none of whom survived more than eight or nine years, was responsible for an estate that would always experience difficulties.¹⁹ Many problems were solved, but there would always be a situation where profitability and stability were elusive. On 27 June 1824, James Weale, employed to audit the estate’s accounts prior to the appointment of a new steward, wrote to George Holroyd to acquaint him with a potentially serious situation. The steward, Lupton, appears to have been incompetent. He had noted, in the estate papers, a deficiency of a ‘considerable number’ of animals in the estate’s sheep flock, referring to them as ‘unrecorded casualties’. There was no explanation or suggestion as to the fate of the beasts. Weale warned the Earl against placing too much reliance, when appointing a successor, on a steward who was not subject to the necessary ‘superintendence’. Although Weale did not accuse Lupton of any dishonesty, he did indicate to George Holroyd that there were dangers inherent in the estate practices. In the letter, he stated that a lack of supervision would be liable to affect the financial position and commercial viability of the estate:

in the absence of the checks which are wanted, every imaginable temptation & facility to defraud are afforded to the person whom you employ as Steward. The yearly amount of the expenditure in labourers’ wages is nearly equal to the present money rental of the estate, and the only checks to

which the accountant is now subjected is the revision of his arithmetic. It is quite evident on the face of the accounts, that the net Income of the Estate has been reduced by this large expenditure, in other words, that the cultivation of the farms in hand has been attended with loss, waiving all considerations for rent. It appears that there are no regular accounts or inventories, either of the live or dead farming stock; and that there was no formal examination & transfer of either to Mr. Lupton.²⁰

As Lupton appeared to be incompetent, Weale was concerned that the necessary checks should be in place prior to the appointment of Thomas Turner as his successor. 'I have therefore given directions that proper inventories be immediately prepared,.'²¹ As Beckett states; 'Favourable salaries and support for a steward's own interests were part of the price of loyalty, but even so the temptation to avarice was more than many men could resist.'²²

Many of the difficulties that the Earl inherited, which were connected with the administration of the estate, seem to have been the result of the employment of stewards who were inexperienced in the use of acceptable accounting techniques or who were lacking in the necessary management skills. Problems would be partially solved at Sheffield by the appointment of William Cooke who was aware of the modern trends in agriculture but who, unfortunately, would always find difficulty in persuading the Earl to invest the necessary capital in essential projects.

WILLIAM COOKE, STEWARD

Evidence of Cooke's career before being appointed by George Holroyd does not appear to have survived. Also, no steward's, farm or voucher account books for the period of Cooke's stewardship have yet been found. He was in his early 70s when he began the task of putting the affairs of the Sheffield estate into some semblance of order. From his grasp of estate matters in general and those of Sheffield in particular, it would seem that he had had experience in small to average-sized estates for a substantial part of his working life. The only information that has been obtained from the surviving records is that he had a son, Layton, who was probably established in land agency and law.²³

The situation at Sheffield in 1828, when William Cooke succeeded Thomas Turner (steward from c. 1824 until 1828), was far from ideal and many problems that had been dormant would soon reappear to make difficulties for the new incumbent. Turner had had to contend with tenant farmers who constantly complained of rents that were too high and meagre profits which caused them great hardship if they attempted to meet their obligations under the terms of their leases.²⁴

In October 1829, Cooke in his regular letter to the Earl informed him of the new lettings on the estate. The Sheffield Arms, its stables and Vigoes Farm²⁵ as well as Clinton Lodge with Northhall²⁶ and 'other lands' would improve the balance of capital: 'The Rent Roll will be materially augmented and I hope will in future be better paid. I am now preparing to inform the tenants that every arrear must be liquidated at or before Christmas ensuing and by that time a sound sum will be accumulated.'²⁷ Cooke was beginning to rationalize the cash flow to improve the estate's economy, but his optimism on the letting of these farms proved unfounded: the prospective tenants withdrew their offers. The Sheffield rent books that survive, although covering a later period, 1854–1860, illustrate the continuing problem that stewards at Sheffield would have had to contend with: persuading tenants to pay, not only rents due in each six-month period, but also arrears, which in some cases were beginning to reach worrying levels.²⁸

There would be difficulties with tenants, local parishioners and the village clergy throughout Cooke's time at Sheffield and many of these would be intractable. Local inhabitants complained that the Sheffield estate was not fulfilling its duty to maintain buildings, fences and the infrastructure in good condition. George Holroyd's tardiness in making funds available to pay the bills of merchants and artisans added to the problems within the community. Cooke brought to the Earl's notice a number of accounts that had remained unpaid for some considerable time. The blacksmith, the collar maker and the glazier all had accounts outstanding for up to 12 months.²⁹

The land at Sheffield always presented difficulties for efficient agrarian management, but its viability was maintained and the integrity preserved at this time. The balance between the three distinct types of land had to be kept under constant review and all the skill of the steward

would have been needed to ensure this. External factors, such as the end of the Napoleonic wars, the concomitant glut of labour, which forced down prices and wages, and parliamentary legislation, including the Poor and Corn Laws, would add to the steward's difficulties. Nationally, the average level at which rents were set after 1835 rose steadily during the lifetime of George Holroyd.³⁰ However, the poor quality of the farmland on most of the Sheffield estate prevented the tenant farmers from producing crops which would sustain their families and pay the entire rent bills.

Because of his ability to convey, with lucidity and a sense of urgency, the general problems associated with the running of the estate, William Cooke was able to provide George Holroyd with the necessary information he required.³¹ Cooke was a manager at a transitional period between the old style steward and the more theoretically and practically educated land agent of the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

He provided a good organizational base for the successful economy of the small Wealden estate, but he was forced to operate within the constraints of capital expenditure allowed by Holroyd. This was often insufficient to effect changes in equipment and methods of husbandry. A letter from Layton Cooke, who was employed on an *ad hoc* basis by the estate, to George Holroyd, dated 19 May 1831, informed the Earl that he should spend £300 for 40 to 50 head of young stock to be kept in the park; 'without that sum the land cannot be turned to good account.'³² On 20 May 1831 William Cooke wrote to George Holroyd to reinforce the suggestions put forward by his son: 'With proper stock for the Park at the late low prices a considerable profit would have been produced. I am of opinion full two hundred pounds, I long ago appraised Your Lordship that at this season cattle would be required ... Really, My Lord, the situation of things require (*sic*) particular consideration, I may be censured for this suggestion, but I ever will conscientiously perform my duty.' He continued by explaining that 'the land now in hand to produce rent, taxes, interest and profit, requires at least a capital of £3000 in cash, stock, implements and cultivation.'³³

If the reproof in this letter was a catalyst in the escalating deterioration of the relationship between Cooke and the Earl, then it was unfortunate that the latter was not able to appreciate the value of his steward: someone who would make a succinct

appraisal of any problem in the daily organization of the estate absolutely clear to his employer, a manager who had a detailed knowledge of the estate and its requirements. Cooke was the victim of a situation that was still only too common in the first half of the nineteenth century. Many landowners were more likely to use the income from their estates to maintain their standard of living than to ensure that the fabric of farms and other premises was kept in good order. Sound maintenance schedules and the improvement of land and stock to increase profitability, were of secondary importance to them.

In general, at this time, the landlords' management of estates was criticised on the grounds that they failed to support their tenants with adequate capital expenditure ... , and that the running of the estate was subordinated to the needs of aristocratic sport, while detailed control was often placed in the hands of ignorant amateurs ...³⁴

William Cooke, however, could not be described as one of the 'ignorant amateurs'.

There were often difficulties in the re-letting of farms on the Sheffield estate when tenants relinquished their leases or were not offered a new lease and rental agreement. These difficulties were compounded, in many cases, by the poor condition of the farmland, destruction of crops by predators and the general dereliction of farm buildings and boundaries. Cooke was well aware of the problems that would have to be resolved in order to improve profitability but he realized that any further financial backing from George Holroyd was unlikely to be forthcoming.

Although many positions of estate steward, at this time, were obtained more by association, patronage or nepotism, than by qualification or ability, it is unlikely that William Cooke was appointed for any reason other than merit. His management style and his ability to bring sound and reasoned arguments to bear on the daily problems encountered on the estate, apparent from his communications to his employer, would have resulted in his being highly valued by the Earl. This was accepted by George Holroyd at the end of Cooke's career at Sheffield in letters associated with his dismissal.³⁵

Throughout the nineteenth century, the wages of agricultural labourers, and therefore their standard of living, showed a continual decline, apart

from a brief period in the 1830s.³⁶ The escalating problems of decaying infrastructure, difficulties in attracting suitable tenants for vacant holdings, uneasy lines of communication between steward and landowner, a general feeling of dissatisfaction in the labour force caused by low wages, high commodity prices and high unemployment were to cause violent outbreaks of rioting mainly in the south and east of England.³⁷

In order to reduce the tension between the farm labourers and the landowners, Cooke recognised that efforts would have to be made to alleviate the workers' harsh living conditions. He saw the need for an estate to help its labour force as far as the economy would allow. Cooke actively supported the scheme of Harriet, Countess of Sheffield, to give labourers an opportunity to keep their own cow. An estate worker by the name of Brooker had a problem. Cooke informed the Earl, 'Brooker having nowhere to keep his heifer I have taken her into the park for which he is willing to pay.'³⁸ The wish of the countess to help the labour force gave Cooke the means to apply pressure on the Earl to agree his intention to give work to the needy. Late in November 1830, 30 men were being employed at Northhall to improve the land and to make 'Rough places plain'.³⁹ Couch grass was being turned and buried in trenches to give employment at a time of year when there was a shortage of work. This would reduce the effects of unemployment and the drain on the funds used to alleviate the conditions of the poor. Good progress was being made, the men were working well and they appeared to be happy. The cost of this improvement of the land was high, but it was considered worthwhile in the long term as the land would be easier to work and the chances of riots reduced. The fields would now produce crops that, once sold, would help to offset the revenue lost from rent. Another project designed to give work to the estate labourers was the improvement of the ground near the mansion. Cooke wrote to the Earl: 'The work on the lawn does not exercise in the ratio of labourers, as there are not enough barrows for them, nor have any proper barrows been obtained, I am obliged to turn a few of them to other work.'⁴⁰ It was hoped that these actions would represent a good public relations exercise as far as Fletching was concerned and that there would be less likelihood of mobs burning and looting in the parish or the estate.

Cooke was successful in persuading the parish

authorities to support his plans to find work for the unemployed. The magistrate, Warburton Davis of Westgate, Danehill, agreed with Cooke's measures to alleviate the problems of some of the parish poor. Cooke pointed out that, although he had done what he could, 'I have taken labourers on, but I do not see how I can compel other Persons to do so.'⁴¹ Although the Sheffield estate made these attempts to alleviate the problem of a disaffected labour force, there were other contributory causes of unrest including the Settlement Act and the New Poor Law of 1834.⁴² Tenants and labourers alike suffered from a downturn in the profits from agricultural investment and the perpetual state of arrears in the rental income of the Sheffield estate could be attributed to these factors.

The poverty of farm labourers, which by the late eighteenth century began to cause concern in certain sections of society, was the subject of much debate. It was realized by some landowners, clergy and others aware of the dangerous situation, that steps would have to be taken to alleviate the harsh living conditions of the workforce or run the risk of unrest progressing to civil disorder. In the early 1830s, against a background of high winter unemployment in the south of England, falling wages added to the difficulties experienced by rural communities. The Swing riots caused considerable alarm amongst landowners and, following the lead given by the Earl of Chichester, they began to consider the provision of small parcels of land with labourers' cottages and the setting aside of areas for allotments. Armstrong states that 'it was no coincidence that in 1831 Parliament extended the scope for parishes to form them, while numerous private landlords took similar initiatives in the aftermath of Swing.'⁴³ However, Burchardt suggests that 'allotments may have been the exception rather than the rule in Sussex in this period.'⁴⁴ The pressure on the Earl by the countess and Cooke could well have increased the income of labourers at Sheffield by as much as 20% and may have affected the level of output when the granting of 'cow pasture' and allotment rights were not generally available in Sussex for a further 50 years.⁴⁵ Some years later, on 14 June 1844, Sir Henry Bunbury, the squire of Barton Hall, Norfolk, was to write to *The Times*:

I do not believe that the world can produce a more willing, hardworking race of men
— Let them have cottages and land at decent

rates ... Do not discharge them because there comes a day of rain or a day of frost; talk to them; talk with them; come to know and advise and encourage them – You will have no more fires.⁴⁶

Landowners were beginning to appreciate the seriousness of the labour unrest that forward-thinking land agents, such as Nathaniel Kent, had warned about 50 years earlier.⁴⁷

At Sheffield, there was an assumption that the Swing riots would pass them by. Were not the workers happy and content with their allotted places in the social order and were not efforts being made to alleviate some of the bad social conditions? Landlords and petty officials alike could not understand how their labourers could be anything but hardworking and loyal. And so it was with shock and dismay that the congregation of Fletching church heard on a Sunday, probably in October 1830 (letter from William Cooke to Lord Sheffield undated),⁴⁸ that Charles Gaunt, the curate, desired a special meeting of the parish vestry to be convened immediately after morning service. Cooke, who liked to conduct his life in strict accordance with the rules laid down by the Church of England and who would not voluntarily deviate, in the slightest extent, from those rules, objected to parish meetings being held on Sundays. Notwithstanding his moral position, he attended the meeting in order to be able to give a report to his employer. Referring to the current situation by the use of allegory, he described an incident some years previously at Danehill where 'there was a mill, a grinder worked therein who neglected to lubricate the gudgeons, the velocity engendered heat, the ignited metal in contact with the timbers — in a few hours after the miller quitted, the mill produced a blaze — the mill became ashes.'⁴⁹ Continuing, he warned of the consequences of inaction; 'but a different feeling now pervades the alarmed population.'⁵⁰

The curate, Gaunt, proposed the formation of a patrol to guard the parish in which he would participate. Cooke, ever ready to make alternative suggestions to proposals made by Gaunt, wrote to George Holroyd: 'I proposed that each person should watch on his own premises to have two or three rallying points and at each station to have equestrians ready in case of fire to procure assistance and endeavour to intercept persons running about.'⁵¹

Despite Cooke's efforts, problems connected with the 'Captain Swing' disturbances were to affect the parish. Tom Brown, employed by the estate, was charged with inciting a riot. He was alleged to have urged his fellow workers, by letter and at a meeting in the village, to set fire to some of Lord Sheffield's buildings. Brown denied that he had any intention of harming estate property, but he was found guilty and sentenced to transportation for life. Cooke managed to persuade the Earl to withdraw any charges of a civil nature but, despite personal intervention by George Holroyd, the judge would not commute the sentence to seven years' transportation or penal servitude in England, as the Earl had urged; it was far too serious an offence. Cooke, who could not understand why all his efforts to help Brown had failed, even to the extent of getting the Earl to agree to sign a petition, wrote plaintively to his employer: 'an aunt of Tom Brown burned a house down in Fletching but got off and afterwards singed Butcher Weston's house, she was discharged without punishment.'⁵²

This, the most serious incident to occur at Sheffield in the 1830s, was handled with skill and understanding by Cooke. However, some of his actions and his failure to present his opinions in such a way as to gain the support of some influential people in the parish, were contributory causes of his subsequent difficulties. It is apparent that William Cooke's ability to organize and administer the estate was beyond question. It was unfortunate that his propensity to alienate some of the inhabitants of Fletching, with whom he would be expected to form a close working relationship, was such that it would exacerbate an inherently difficult situation.

COOKE AND THE PARISH CLERGY

Cooke, who during the late 1820s was responsible for efficient stewardship at Sheffield, was also partly responsible for a great deal of acrimony between himself and certain local citizens and the church in Fletching. From the beginning of his employment as steward at Sheffield, Cooke appears to have upset the parish clergy because of his determination to carry forward those plans that he considered to be essential for the efficient and profitable running of the estate. His policies were carried out regardless of the effects that they may have had upon others

whose interests lay both within and outside the boundaries of Sheffield. Tension between Cooke and the clergy first become apparent in 1829. In November of that year, having paid the tithe to the vicar, Cooke was told that he would not be welcome at the customary tithe dinner.⁵³ The vicar and his curate were not satisfied with his response to their request to repair fences between Clinton Lodge and the vicarial glebe, and repairs to the Earl's pew in Fletching church were unsatisfactory.

The vicar's attitude towards him over the paying of tithes upset Cooke, who then wrote to the Earl: 'I had to pay Mr. Woodward [the vicar] for the tithe last week and was told I should be roughly handled if I dined there.'⁵⁴ After a great deal of pressure from the curate, Cooke wrote to the Earl on 11 November 1829:

it was urged that Lord Sheffield ought to give something and that I ought to do so — I replied that my situation was to pay just demands. I was not His Lordship's almoner. ... Mr. Gaunt lately accosted me for some work to repair his fences ... The reverend then requested me to go with him to talk about the fence between Clinton Lodge & his chapel garden — I told him my opinion remained unchanged and that I should not further interfere.⁵⁵

Thus was precipitated the beginning of the decline in the relationship between Cooke and the parish. This decline gained a momentum that would not be halted. The acrimonious and unpleasant association between Cooke and Gaunt, together with others in the parish, that would lead to the dismissal of Cooke in 1832, was becoming apparent to everyone.

Charles Gaunt preached a sermon, on the Sunday following the tithe dinner, which Cooke interpreted as a personal attack upon his integrity as Lord Sheffield's steward. This alleged attack appears to have escalated the worsening relationship between Cooke and the clergy. Cooke wrote to Gaunt and the letter shows the former's fury at the perceived insults which he traded for a good measure of his own;

I regret that any minister of the Church of England should engender strife and the depravity becomes more afflictive when base and false aspersions are amalgamated with sacred subjects — done for the diabolical purpose of provoking discord⁵⁶

Gaunt wrote to George Holroyd, questioning Cooke's psychological state of mind and enclosing a copy of his letter:

Has Your Lordship the least idea that there is any tendency to derangement with Cooke; for this extraordinary production of his Pen and this unprovoked & scurrilous Attack can scarcely be accounted for on any other grounds.⁵⁷

The Earl's reply attempted to calm the situation and gives the impression that he did not expect it to develop in the way that it eventually did:

I am very much shocked & annoyed at my Steward having written you such a letter ... It certainly contains most improper language and I am sure he must on reflection be much ashamed of it. ... I trust that he will make an apology to you for the course he has thought proper to take in consequence of his misinterpretation of your sermon.⁵⁸

George Holroyd continued that he hoped all differences between them would be resolved and that the quarrel would not become widely known in the neighbourhood. He made it clear that he felt the whole incident had reached a stage when Cooke must recognise that his outburst was wholly unjustifiable. No harm was intended by the sermon preached by Gaunt and Cooke would have to apologize. Gaunt then wrote to the Earl to say that 'there has not been nor is there any difference between Mr. Cooke & myself as Individuals to be adjusted; as I have never had any personal dispute with him whatsoever before or since his letter.' None the less, he then complained that Cooke had shown his original letter to one of the Sheffield servants thereby 'he must have exposed me to the butt & jest of your Servants Hall and that he had boasted he should write & silence me.' The letter continued by informing George of Cooke's threat to 'leave the church if I uttered the least thing which he did not approve of; a threat that on the following Sunday he showed himself in readiness to execute by standing up at his pew door during the Sermon for the purpose of going out, of which many of my congregation understood the meaning.' The letter continued by asking George if he thought a clergyman should ignore the matter:

but whether as Curate of your parish it is right and proper in me or conducive to my influence in the moral and religious

improvement of my parish to let his imprecations lapse without the fullest indication against the abominable language of his letter and the open insults he has in perseverance of it offered the church.

I have indeed no vindictive feelings to satisfy in this business: but I am sure Your Lordship must agree with me that, without the most ample apology to be as notorious as the attack on me which calls for it has been made public by him, I ought to have recourse to the law for protection and I feel certain that you must see with me that I have no other alternative left.⁵⁹

Gaunt's alleged verbal attack on Cooke in his sermon finally ended any hope of reconciliation between the latter and the village clergy. The state of tension that arose between them was not an uncommon factor in the village life of England generally. Holderness comments that 'The average Victorian village had so many conflicts or suppressed discontents to divide or incense its people that the uneasy relations which existed between the parson and so many of his leading ratepayers were a matter of regret but not of surprise to contemporaries.'⁶⁰

It seems hardly surprising that differences between the parish clergy and William Cooke should have deteriorated to such an alarming extent when Inglis's criticism of some theologians 'who cared as little about the spiritual condition of the masses as the masses were supposed to care about religion', is considered.⁶¹ In many instances the clergy did very little to heal any rifts and, in some cases, made the problem worse. The clergy in Fletching was secure in so far as the 'close' community was more likely to adhere to the church's doctrines than would be the case in much of the High Weald. Amongst the sandstone ridges and deep ghylls, where the independent and stubborn nature of the inhabitants mitigated against the likelihood of their expected deference, the wealden population, including immigrants and itinerant traders, pursued lives that held little regard for convention. In the 'open' parishes nonconformist sects, some of quite a bizarre nature, would have presented a threat to the established routines of the Church of England. Indeed, Inglis writes that, in the first half of the nineteenth century, 'Wesleyan Methodist membership alone increased about twice as fast as the population.'⁶²

Cooke's single-minded adherence to his own principles, and his diminishing respect for the parish clergy, would have given the vicar and curate of Fletching cause for concern. There was always the possibility of Cooke's attitude further driving a wedge between the Established Church and the Dissenters represented by the 'close' and 'open' communities respectively. It is possible that Cooke's attitude, whilst not challenging the established doctrines of the Church, caused him to be perceived as a threat, because of his intractability.

THREATS FROM 'THE PULPIT TO THE POSTHOUSE'

On 24 April 1830, Cooke complained to the magistrate, Warburton Davis, about threats from John Weston, a butcher in Fletching village, against Lord Sheffield and himself a few days previously: demonstrations of mischief against me ... I should endeavour to protect myself with all the physical power I possessed, if insufficient I should have recourse to other means – my life threatened ... I felt justified in telling him I should in future put a pistol in my pocket.

Later, in the Sheffield Arms, John Weston entered demanding his money — I told him to hand his account to me by some proper person On my quitting the house, John, as I expected, was in the passage and with dreadful imprecations assailed me — I told him that if ever he attacked me on the King's Highway I should show him this, producing my pistol.⁶³

Weston afterwards complained to a local magistrate, who asked Cooke to come to see him to answer a charge of presenting a pistol and threatening to shoot Weston. Cooke replied that he had other engagements and that he had only shown the pistol to Weston and had not threatened to shoot him, Hartfield would bear witness 'that the pistol was scarcely out of my pocket and that I would show it if ever he attacked me.' The letter was left with Hartfield, the landlord of the Sheffield Arms, to pass on. Warburton Davis accepted Cooke's statement and was severe with Weston, 'as Hartfield wrote later, rated him famously for about 40 minutes — threatening to have him bound to keep the peace.' Warburton Davis then wrote to

Cooke: 'Sir, from the account of the transaction which occurred at the Sheffield Arms yesterday evening, I shall not trouble you any further on the subject.'⁶⁴

The tensions between Cooke and certain people in the village of Fletching were becoming acute and soon others would have a perceived cause to pursue a vendetta against the Earl's steward. During the course of the prosecution of the case against him, Thomas Brown had maintained that William Miller and his son had persuaded him to write the letter. Brown's father had 'uttered some persuasives to Padgham and others about letter writing, to frighten the great folk.'⁶⁵ The elder Brown, William Miller and his son were dismissed from the service of the Earl of Sheffield in September 1831. Earlier, in May, problems had arisen over the quality of the work performed by the workforce. Cooke wrote on 18 May 1831: 'I have lately discharged some labourers and employed their children on the same work who have done daily more than their parents.' It may have been that Cooke was not capable of acting for the estate in a manner that would mitigate the inevitable adverse reaction to his essential and pragmatic decisions. Those members of the community who were adversely affected by Cooke's actions were not prepared to accept the situation, and the probability is that events were beginning to lead to inevitable open and unresolvable conflict between the Earl of Sheffield and his steward. On 18 June 1831 Cooke wrote to George Holroyd to complain once again about the level of the budget with which the Sheffield estate had to be managed. He had had to pay his predecessor, out of his own pocket, £3 12s. 1½d., the balance due to him. In addition, Cooke complained that:

there were outstanding claims to a large amount, the stock of little value and the crops bad, nor was there any preparation for future good — all was in confusion. To arrange a system and enforce order *interrupted many improper doings* [writer's italics]. I was assailed overtly and covertly and pelted in every place from the Pulpit to the Posthouse, there have been busy bodies too, Your Lordship cannot Gather figs from thistles.⁶⁶

It becomes evident from the increasing number of references to people mentioned in his reports to George Holroyd, most of which do not reflect any credit upon those who did not meet with

Cooke's expected standards of behaviour, that an undercurrent of vindictiveness was flowing within the confines of the parish that would be difficult or even impossible to stem. Thomas Brown's father, William Miller and his son, dismissed by Cooke for reasons unspecified but probably concerned with the sentencing of Thomas to life transportation, would have had reason to dislike Cooke. William Cave and Thomas Smith felt that their integrity had been undermined by the actions of the Earl's steward during the course of the 'Swing' troubles. William Franklin, Richard Dumbrell, George Turner and John Weston had all suffered as a result of Cooke's determination that standards not only within the Sheffield estate, but also the entire parish, should be kept at the highest possible level. All these parishioners had motives that could have resulted in a conspiracy to destroy the character and credibility of William Cooke. A letter written to George Holroyd in September 1831, nearly a year after the advent of the 'Swing' disturbances in Fletching, and signed by William Franklin, Richard Dumbrell, George Turner and John Weston, accused Cooke of using crude and unseemly language in referring to a housekeeper at Sheffield Place. Cooke had made the remarks in front of witnesses when accusing a member of the parish vestry of ill-mannered and improper conduct. Cooke maintained that he had said something but it had been exaggerated and, in any case, it was said in jest. He then continued; 'Nor do I know how to write more about the matter, I may as Mr. Shandy did on a like subject wish "That I had minded what I was about".' In reply, the Earl expressed his regrets that: 'You made use of language of such a nature that it is quite impossible that I can overlook when coming from ... the representative of myself whom I should wish always to set an example of propriety of conduct & temperate language.' He continued that he could not condone Cooke's action and that he had regrets concerning the 'hastiness of your temper & style of your language'. This had placed him in an impossible position. He concluded ominously, 'I am extremely sorry to be under the necessity of making this communication to you as in other respects I have every reason to be satisfied with your conduct.' He said that he had always defended Cooke, where possible, and fully realized the difficulties inherent in the post of steward. He could not, however, condone the use of language heard by so many people and which

he could 'hardly have believed'. A month later, a letter, signed by William Diplock, landlord of the Griffin inn, Fletching, and John B. White, carried on the campaign against Cooke: 'Mr. Cooke came into my house with the Hop assistant and in the parlour, before us both.' This letter continued in the same vein as the previous one and was equally explicit in its allegations.⁶⁷

END OF A CAREER

On 13 October Cooke wrote to the Earl and it is evident from the tone of his letter that he was aware of how untenable his situation had become; 'My Lord, I have several times said that should Your Lordship require my removal I would cheerfully obey and hope the parting would be as we met.' He continued that he would leave with the 'comfortable reflection' of having been faithful and had 'raised the estate to respectability'. He then listed the outstanding claims on the estate for various bills and wages. The following day Cooke received a letter from George Holroyd expressing his regrets and making it quite clear that he would not tolerate such behaviour in one of his employees:

I am very sorry to have been obliged to have recourse to the means which I have taken in desiring your removal. I assure you that I have never in the slightest degree doubted your fidelity, integrity and highly approve of your system of management of my affairs but it is quite unacceptable that I should overlook your use of such improper language which would totally prevent a proper respect being paid to you. I have often before regretted the warmth of your temper ... Your language is the only reason for parting with you. I regret being compelled to do so. You are welcome to a room at Clinton Lodge [Fletching] till the affairs are settled.

Five days later, the Earl of Sheffield received a reply: My Lord! I dared not to shrink from a duty, but being pushed from the conflict is well pleasing, although the insidious Cave may still pry about – Smith may appear pure and I shall be stigmatised as a liar – Weston may plead suffering and say I am a robber – Turner may continue smooth and say I am perjured — but of these things I am innocent. ... I have been unjustly vilified – but a clear conscience

has ever cheered me on my way. My 75th year is nearly closed, the dust of death may, nay must, soon be scattered over my face ...

I swear that I never have connected or been connected in any act rendering me liable to suffer condign punishment.

The last paragraph of the letter simply stated that all he required was an 'honourable summing up of matters between Your Lordship and me'.⁶⁸

It would seem that William Cooke had reached a stage in his life when he no longer thought it worthwhile to combat the continual attacks upon his character and was prepared to pass into obscurity. The conspiracy, relentlessly crafted by a group of local inhabitants of the village, had reached its hoped-for conclusion owing to the attitude of the Earl of Sheffield who, rather than listen to the explanation of his loyal manager, was more concerned with acquiring a political solution to the problem and, in so doing, preserving the somewhat uneasy alliance between the 'open' and 'close' communities of the estate and its environs.

Cooke continued to manage the estate for a further year after his formal dismissal. He was involved in vestry meetings concerned with the fixing of labourers' wages, with the problems, which seemed to be ever present, over the collection of the poor rate by the overseers and with general estate concerns such as the auction of underwood and the maintenance of the park and home farm. In November 1832, William Cooke left Clinton Lodge and the Sheffield estate for the last time. Moving to lodgings in Newick, he continued to involve himself with outstanding affairs on the estate from that date until May 1833. He was concerned with the activities of the tenants of Atheralls and Eastlands farms who not only owed rent but also were apparently employing doubtful practices in the 'buying and selling of hayricks'. Many of the tenants who were causing problems on the estate were those with whom Cooke had had trouble when steward at Sheffield. Several of these were the same people who had conspired in his downfall or who were involved to some extent with his difficulties. A number of people in the parish, including George Holroyd, still owed money to Cooke and he was beginning to experience financial difficulties. Despite the straitened circumstances in which he now existed, Cooke continued to bring to a conclusion those affairs of the estate that

required his intimate knowledge and experience. By midsummer of 1833, most of these outstanding affairs appear to have been satisfactorily dealt with and the new steward, Hayward, took charge of the daily management of the estate, although it was to be several more months before all problems which required Cooke's attention were brought to a conclusion.

On 12 January 1837, Cooke wrote to George Holroyd complaining that the Earl had unjustly accused him of 'criminal acts'. 'I do most solemnly declare the charge to be unfounded & I request Your Lordship forthwith to contradict the calumny. If competent measures for that purpose are not pursued by Your Lordship, I shall proceed as I may be advised.' George, rather than communicate directly with Cooke, wrote to his solicitor, Edward Verrell, 'I cannot understand what he means or make out to what he alludes'. Cooke also wrote to Verrell, on 23 January, to explain his version of the events prior to Lady Day 1832. Having received notification to quit from Midsummer's Day 1832, he brought the estate accounts up to date as far as was possible and charged the estate a year's salary in lieu of notice. Cooke then continued to wind up those affairs that were of particular relevance to him.

Legal action was instituted by Verrell, on behalf of the Earl of Sheffield, to recover the salary received in lieu of notice.⁶⁹ Cooke realized that his situation had reached its lowest point when his pew in Fletching church, in the indulgence of the Earl, was withdrawn in June 1837. In desperation, on 7 November 1837, Cooke reminded George Holroyd that, when he left the Earl's employment at Midsummer 1832, the accounts were passed by the auditor. Also, that he had been directed by Lord Sheffield to carry on bringing the estate papers up to date before handing everything over to Hayward on Midsummer's Day 1833. Owing to the charges brought against him by the Earl, Cooke had had no paid work for a year. A letter dated 11 February 1838, from Cooke to George, explained that his creditors were pressing and would not supply him with the necessities of life:

Besides the wish to repay my creditors I am at this moment without one penny, with scarcely food sufficient for my breakfast tomorrow and on every attempt to obtain assistance I have been baffled. I humbly entreat Your Lordship's immediate attention.

I feel fairly entitled to three guineas per week as for one person, during seven months – the amount of my claim becomes eighty eight pounds and four shillings. I beseech Your Lordship to help me!

Three days later, Cooke received a reply from the Earl which was not only curtly dismissive of Cooke's request, but also showed a lack of understanding of the debt he owed to his former steward; 'I shall not grant a single farthing on that account. All matters between you, your son and myself were finally settled between four and five years ago.' He then added, 'Your statement of the distress you are now suffering induces me to send a couple of pounds for your relief as a gift' but he added that all other claims for salary or compensation were rejected.

On 26 March, Cooke wrote to the Earl, 'it only remains for a jury to determine between us and as the statute of limitations is impending, further deliberation is precluded.' Cooke made no further progress in his claim for compensation. In a letter dated 21 November 1839, Cooke wrote to the Earl in the hope that help would be forthcoming:

My Lord, From Midsummer 1832 to this moment I have been unemployed excepting on work on Your Lordship's account. My relatives cannot at present further help me. I am being turned out of my lodging as I cannot pay the rent. Whither to go I know not being deprived of all social intercourse. My indisposition at various periods during the last year or two were occasioned by scarcity of food and scanty raiment. I am so-so in health, but know not where to earn money to purchase necessities. The above calamities are the resulting consequences of my having been blasted by vile unfounded calumny, yet of All the dreadful charges used for the destruction of my reputation, I am perfectly innocent!⁷⁰

CONCLUSION

What subsequently happened to William Cooke after 1840, when a few letters refer to a number of outstanding problems connected with the events of the period prior to his dismissal, cannot be determined. The last significant letter, see above, suggests a tragic close to the life of someone who devoted all his efforts to the interests of the

Holroyd family and of the management of the Sheffield estate. Even after his dismissal and prior to his leaving the estate, he was still concerned with estate matters.⁷¹

Throughout the nineteenth century, many, but certainly not all, of the country's estates were managed by competent, loyal and honest agents whose only aim was to maximize the efficiency and presentation of the properties for which they were responsible. Mingay writes:

there were the conscientious agents who rendered their masters a lifetime of devoted service. Such men came to identify themselves with the estate, and saw their every action as affecting the family's reputation and its future. Sometimes they went much beyond mere responsibility for property management and played an important role in the guiding of family finances.⁷²

There must be some sympathy for William Cooke who, regardless of the difficulties that seemed to be a feature of his position as estate steward at Sheffield, refused to compromise despite the vilification he endured from all corners of the parish. Some of the criticism might have been deserved but, overall, the degree to which he was

persecuted was far in excess of that warranted by any misdemeanours that he might have committed. William Cooke was, despite his many problems, a very efficient and mainly successful, if somewhat undervalued, holder of the post of steward to the Earl of Sheffield.

Over the following half century, the position of steward was to evolve into the highly skilled and technically proficient, land agent. William Cooke, possibly born half a century too soon for the new profession to benefit from his innate abilities, would have found little difficulty in operating successfully within the late Victorian, or even Edwardian, structure of land management. Mingay, in summing up his description of the land agent in the nineteenth century, says: 'However, even if their strategic judgement was not always of the soundest, they were forward looking in their concern for efficiency and technical advance.'⁷⁴ Maybe William Cooke was ahead of his time. It could be argued that he was the architect of his own downfall, but the situation in many estates in the Weald, at that time, was such that resistance to the pragmatic strategies of any competent manager could have resulted in hostility and a desire to remove the offending irritation.

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NOTES

¹ D. R. Hainsworth, 'The essential governor: the estate steward and English society 1660–1714', *Historical Studies (Australia & New Zealand)* **21**(84) (1985), 359–75.

² P. Horn, 'An eighteenth-century land agent: the career of Nathaniel Kent', *Agricultural History Review* **30**(1) (1982), 12.

³ G. E. Mingay, *English Landed Society in the Eighteenth Century* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1963), 62–7.

⁴ G. E. Mingay, 'Estate management in eighteenth-century Kent', *Agricultural History Review* **4**(2) (1956), 108.

⁵ J. V. Beckett, 'Landownership and estate management', in G. E. Mingay (ed.), *The Agrarian History of England and Wales, VI: 1750–1850*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 590–617.

⁶ J. R. Wordie, *Estate Management in Eighteenth-Century England: the Building of the Leveson-Gower Fortune*. (London: Royal Historical Society, 1982), 27–8.

⁷ East Sussex Record Office (hereafter ESRO) ACC 6975.

⁸ B. W. Howe, land agent to the Soames family, 1948–1952, pers. comm.

⁹ J. Burke (ed.), *Genealogical and Heraldic Dictionary of the Peerage and Baronage of the British Empire, 1843* (London: Henry Colburn, 1843).

¹⁰ ESRO, SPK E/6/1 and E/11/1–10.

¹¹ Wordie, 53.

¹² J. V. Beckett, *The Aristocracy of England, 1660–1914* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell Ltd, 1986), 102.

¹³ J. V. Beckett, 'Landownership', 590–617.

¹⁴ D. Spring, *The English Landed Estate in the Nineteenth Century: its Administration*. (Baltimore (MD): The John Hopkins Press, 1963), 97–134.

¹⁵ Although nothing is known of Cooke's education and training in the profession, it is apparent that he had a profound understanding of the requirements for the efficient running of a small estate such as Sheffield. He also had the added advantage of the skills of his son, Layton, in accountancy, legal and actuarial matters.

¹⁶ Spring, 20–54.

¹⁷ J. Caird, *English Agriculture in 1850–51* (London: Longman, Brown, Green & Longmans, 1852), 126–32.

¹⁸ B. M. Short (ed.), *The English Rural Community: Image and Analysis* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 28–41.

¹⁹ ESRO SPK E/11.

²⁰ ESRO SPK E/11/3.

²¹ ESRO SPK E/11/3.

²² Beckett, 'Landownership', 590–617.

²³ ESRO SPK E/11/7.

²⁴ ESRO SPK E/11/5.

²⁵ Vigos was always linked to the inn as a means of persuading prospective licensees to accept the tenancy.

²⁶ The spelling of 'Northhall' is not consistent in the

- archival material. The variants 'Northall' and 'North Hall' are occasionally used. The second of these is the current spelling.
- ²⁷ ESRO SPK E/11/6.
- ²⁸ ESRO SPK E/7, Rent Books, 1854–68.
- ²⁹ ESRO SPK E/11/6.
- ³⁰ Beckett 'Landownership', 618–25.
- ³¹ ESRO SPK E/11/7.
- ³² ESRO SPK E/11/7.
- ³³ ESRO SPK E/11/7.
- ³⁴ J. D. Chambers & G. E. Mingay, *The Agricultural Revolution 1750–1880* (London: B. T. Batsford Ltd, 1966), 161.
- ³⁵ ESRO SPK E/11/6.
- ³⁶ B. A. Holderness & M. Turner, *Land, Labour and Agriculture, 1700–1920* (London & Rio Grande: The Hambledon Press, 1991), 19–90.
- ³⁷ J. M. Stratton & J. Houghton-Brown, *Agricultural Records AD 220–1977*. (London: John Baker (Publishers) Ltd, 1969), 102.
- ³⁸ ESRO SPK E/11/6.
- ³⁹ ESRO SPK E/11/6.
- ⁴⁰ ESRO SPK E/11/6.
- ⁴¹ ESRO SPK E/11/6.
- ⁴² K. D. M. Snell, *Annals of the Labouring Poor*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), 104–37.
- ⁴³ W. A. Armstrong, 'Labour II: food, shelter and self-help, the Poor Law and the position of the labourer in rural society', in G. E. Mingay (ed.), *The Agrarian History of England and Wales, VI: 1750–1850* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 729–833.
- ⁴⁴ J. Burchardt, *The Allotment Movement in England, 1793–1873* (Woodbridge, Suffolk & Rochester (NY): Boydell & Brewer, 2002), 61–2.
- ⁴⁵ Burchardt, 232.
- ⁴⁶ H. Hopkins, *The Long affray, The Poaching Wars, 1760–1914* (London: Secker & Warburg, 1985), 299–300.
- ⁴⁷ Horn, 6.
- ⁴⁸ ESRO SPK E/11/6.
- ⁴⁹ *Brighton Herald*, 4 December 1830, 'About midnight on Saturday last ... , the mill of Mr. Meggis was burned to the ground in under an hour, but it was believed that the fire was purely accidental.' This mill had been built in 1818 and presumably had replaced the one burnt down when the 'gudgeons' overheated.
- ⁵⁰ ESRO SPK E/11/6.
- ⁵¹ ESRO SPK E/11/6.
- ⁵² ESRO SPK E/11/6.
- ⁵³ J. O. Parker, *The Oxley Parker Papers. From the Letters and Diaries of an Essex Family of Land Agents in the Nineteenth Century* (Colchester: Benham & Co. Ltd, 1964), 84. On 8 November 1832 the vicar of Purleigh, the Rev. R. F. Walker, left the venue after the collection of the tithes and before the dinner was due to start. The reason given was another engagement. Walker received a terse letter from the committee chairman admonishing him for his absence saying 'I hope next year you will be able to arrange your engagements so as to favour us with your company.' He also pointed out that the date was fixed each year and there could be no excuse. The tone of the entire letter was one of displeasure, even of hostility, towards the vicar.
- ⁵⁴ ESRO SPK E/11/6.
- ⁵⁵ ESRO SPK E/11/6.
- ⁵⁶ ESRO SPK E/11/6.
- ⁵⁷ ESRO SPK E/11/6.
- ⁵⁸ ESRO SPK E/11/6.
- ⁵⁹ ESRO SPK E/11/6.
- ⁶⁰ B. A. Holderness, 'The Victorian Farmer', in G. E. Mingay (ed.), *The Vanishing Countryman*. (London: Routledge, 1989), 7–25.
- ⁶¹ K. S. Inglis, *Churches and the Working Classes in Victorian England* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul; Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1969), 21.
- ⁶² Inglis, *Churches* 13.
- ⁶³ ESRO, SPK E/11/6.
- ⁶⁴ ESRO, SPK E/11/6.
- ⁶⁵ Thomas Padgham, the wood reeve to the Sheffield estate.
- ⁶⁶ ESRO SPK E/11/6 (reference for all quotations in this paragraph).
- ⁶⁷ ESRO SPK E/11/6 (reference for all quotations in this paragraph).
- ⁶⁸ ESRO SPK E/11/9.
- ⁶⁹ ESRO SPK E/11/9.
- ⁷⁰ ESRO SPK E/11/9.
- ⁷¹ ESRO SPK E/11/9 from a memorandum sent to Lord Sheffield dated 14 June 1832: 'A Bill for a labour rate introduced last year into the House of Commons. The object of which was to relieve the Farmers in their payment of their Poor Rate, while it ensured the better cultivation of the land. It is proposed to adapt this plan in Vestry in this Parish First Ascertain what number of labourers are now employed upon each farm. Then state what number of labourers are likely to be thrown out of employ after Harvest and Hop picking. Then calculate the amount of their wages at 10/- per week & make a Labour Rate for the three months, to pay which each Farmer will become liable according to his occupation – but if he choose to say he will take labourers at these full wages (no part to be paid out of the Poor Rate). Such wages paid weekly shall be allowed in lieu of the Labour Rate.'
- ⁷² G. E. Mingay, *Rural Life in Victorian England* (Stroud: Sutton Publishing Ltd, 1998, first published 1976), 139.
- ⁷³ Mingay, *Rural Life*, 146.